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Agency News

New pre-release program serves Administrative Segregation offenders

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) has developed a new Administrative Segregation (AdSeg) Pre-release Program (ASPP), which offers rehabilitative services to incarcerated offenders who, for the safety of staff members and other offenders, are segregated from the general population.

Introduced in July at the Estelle Unit in Huntsville, the 90-day program began with 67 volunteer offender-participants. In order to participate, offenders must be AdSeg Level I, meaning they have no recent history of major disciplinary infractions, and must be within 90 to 120 days of their scheduled release.

Rehabilitation Programs Division Director Madeline Ortiz says that although the method of program delivery is tailored to the AdSeg population, the goals, objectives and anticipated results are similar to TDCJ's other pre-release programs. "The Administrative Segregation Pre-Release Program is designed to help prepare offenders to reenter society," Ms. Ortiz said, "In that regard it's no different from the programs serving lower custody offend-



Case Manager Jacklyn Holt teaches course lessons through a live video feed.

ers. Those programs have been successful, and I expect similar results from this new initiative."

Sixty-seven cells have been retrofitted with a stand-alone computer system and the technology needed to complete the in-cell, workbook-based curriculum. Designed to help offenders improve their life choices, course work includes 160 program hours, including modules which address functional thinking, coping skills, stress management, release

preparation and family reintegration. "We also have them set up goals, so the offender knows what he's working towards," said ASPP Case Manager Jacklyn Holt. A gang-intervention component is available to offenders wanting to address gang affiliation, and a volunteer-led faith-based component is also available to offenders. Important self-help tools, such as GED test preparation manuals and a safe driver's handbook,

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are made available.

Program participants spend at least six hours a day, including three hours cognitive instruction and two hours of discussion, interacting with case managers and fellow offenders using in-cell computer technology. To help reintroduce participants to normal social activities, offenders receive two hours of news and current events programming each day. Teachers instruct offenders through a live video feed, and offenders can communicate with the instructor and one another through onscreen Question-and-Answer sessions.

ASPP offenders are also allowed additional phone calls to family members and participate in weekly hour-long meetings with case managers, where offenders discuss individual goals, job prospects and skills, and how to best take advantage of important rehabilitation resources available in the community. “We find out where they’re going to discharge to,” says Holt, “so we can get them in touch with the resources they need in that community; Health and Human Services, the Social Security Office, the Texas Workforce Commission.” ASPP Case Manager Laura Cano adds, “If they need something like NA or AA meetings when they get out, we try to find those types of services for them once they get home.”

When possible, offenders receive a copy of their birth certificate and social security card upon release, increasing the likelihood of successful reintegration into society.

Speaking of the benefits of the program Correctional Institutions Division Director Rick Thaler said, “By providing treatment to the administrative segregation population in a manner that is safe for both staff and the general population, we can better accomplish our mission of promoting positive change in offender behavior and reintegrating these individuals into society while continuing to prioritize safety and security.”

The program is currently being expanded to serve all Level I AdSeg offenders. ●